

Gauhar Jan, Month of July and Mumbai

[Rahegi yaad mujhko, Bambai vaalon ki mehmani]

July 2010.

A month to remember 'Kalkatte wali Gauhar Jan', a famous 'tawaif' (courtesan) and the first gramophone celebrity of last century. After about a century, she is again 'talk of the town' because of the latest English book, 'My Name is Gauhar Jan' by Vikram Sampath. [Rupa publications, New Delhi]. The book has been released ceremonially in major cities in India and has now entered into the second impression in just three months. On this occasion, in July, two listening sessions were organized in Mumbai, one at Bhavan's cultural center, Andheri and the other at NCPA complex, Nariman Point, in South Mumbai. Large crowd of senior citizens was drawn by her recorded music. Every song that was played finished with a slogan: 'My Name is Gauhar Jan'. While listening to these rather noisy recordings, my mind began to wander in the past

July 1907.

'Gauhar Jan of Calcutta' had become quite famous through her gramophone records and had also appeared on picture postcards. She used to visit Bombay mainly for two reasons. She had a lover 'Amrut Keshav Nayak', a famous actor of Gujrathi stage in Bhangwadi Girgaon, and her passion towards horses and race course. In the season, both would spend day at Mahalaxmi race course. In the evenings, she would often perform for common citizens (Aam admi) at 'Capitol' theater opposite Boribunder (V.T.) station. The concert would be packed since the tickets were affordable. She would entertain the audience with her songs and dance. Located nearby was the famous and a century

old 'Town Hall' (Asiatic Library) where elites of the town or 'Khas' citizens would meet. In July 1907, Gauhar Jan was invited for a concert in this hall. She gave an excellent performance for the august audience including great personalities like Phirozeshah Mehta, Seth Gokuldas and Seth Ratansi. She sang a 'Najma' (urdu poem) in which she coined the names of these persons in the audience. She also included the blessings sought for King Edward to live to eternity (kayamat). The song was appreciated by everyone and became popular. After five years, 'The Gramophone Company' decided to record it for a commercial release. So, in 1912, a 78 rpm disc was cut with a special label containing the picture of a recording angel. [Record No. P 365. Dhun Kalyan. Sung by Gauhar Jan, at the Town Hall, Bombay in July 1907.] This record was a collector's item for quite some time. Recently it has been found. The song contains eight stanzas and describes the importance of 'Mumbai' city in the life of Gauhar Jan. She expresses her gratitude towards the town and patrons of Mumbai. At the end after her usual announcement, she says, 'Yeh Kammal ka gana hai. Phirozeshah Mehtaki tarifmen'. [This is an amazing song. In praise of Feroz Shah Mehta]

Soon after this concert, Amrut Keshav Nayak passed away suddenly on July 18th 1907. Today, road behind Khadi Bhandar on P.M. (Phirozeshah Mehta) road is named after him. Gauhar has left behind over 200 songs on three minute shellac discs. The 'Town Hall' building has completed over two hundred years and going strong. 'Capitol' theater building is surrounded by drug addicts and waiting for its reincarnation.

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Dhun Kalyan Quawali (P.365)

Chalo guljar aalam me havaye fajla rahmani
Phala phoola khada har kaam ise rakhna nakhla bostani...1

Hai to yeh jahanmen aab hath gar dastyon bhi man
Garja hindu musalman sab ke sab hai khanda peshani...2

Jaiye majlis hun jinke sadra sarbhi dor ka aisa
Vah bark andaz Gokul Das jee Iqbal ho bani...3

Rahe abad ya rab bambai tu aur bambai wale
Kahan main ek musafir aur kahan yeh kadra sultani...4

Mujhe ijjat jo bakshi aur jo hai kadra kee meri
Rahegi yaad mujhko bambai walon ki mehmani...5

Jahanke school ke malik Ratansi sethji sahab
Karen bachhonki khidmat aur Karen unki nighbani...6

Khudaya Shah Edward ko tu rakh jinda kayamat tak
Rahe kayam hukumat aur hove fajla rabbani.....7

Duva par sar jhuka kar khatma karta hun kalam apna
Rahen sab meherban unpar ho sab par fajla ehsani.....8

My Name is Gauhar Jan
Yeh Kammal ka gana hai
Phirozeshah Mehta ki tarifmen





Miss Goher-Jan.